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## ASSUMED CONTRADICTIONS IN THE SEASONS OF THE *ODYSSEY*

BY JOHN A. SCOTT

Professor Georg Finsler in his review of Rothe's "*Odyssee als Dichtung*," *DLZ*, August 15, 1914, p. 2058, lays great emphasis on the assumed fact that the later and earlier books of the *Odyssey* represent different seasons of the year and that accordingly they cannot belong to the same original conception. He argues that the assembly of the Ithacans, the journey of Telemachus, and the entire first four books have as their setting the warm weather of summer, while the story of Odysseus from his arrival at the land of the Phaeacians until his reunion with Penelope demands the cold and raw temperature of the late autumn or early winter. Professor Finsler bases these conclusions on the arguments already advanced by Wilamowitz in his *Homerische Untersuchungen*, p. 87.

If the Telemacheia demands the heat of summer and the rest of the poem the cold of late autumn or early winter, then there can be no assertion of the unity of plan and authorship of the poem, and the *Odyssey* must admittedly be the amalgamation of two stories of independent origin.

It is manifestly difficult to assign such poetry to definite months or seasons, yet the *Odyssey* presupposes a background in the seasons of the year, of which background there are several vague and one fairly definite indication.

The fairly definite indication is the following: When Odysseus went from the presence of Calypso and sailed toward the land of the Phaeacians, he guided his course by means of the following constellations and stars:

ε 272: Πληνάδας τ' ἐσορῶντι καὶ ὁψὲ δύοντα Βοώτην  
ἄρκτον θ', ἦν καὶ ἄμαξαν ἐπίκλησιν καλέοντιν,  
ἥ τ' αὐτοῦ στρέφεται καὶ τ' Ὄριωνα δοκεύει.

Merry-Riddell in their edition computed the date on the basis of these stars as the autumnal equinox. Finsler puts it about two months

later, saying in the passage mentioned above: "Die Hinweise auf winterliche Jahreszeit beginnen € 272, denn nur im Spätherbst sind Pleiaden und Bootes zugleich am Himmel sichtbar."

Professor Philip Fox, director of Dearborn Observatory, has very kindly figured with laborious accuracy the exact position of these stars from 900 to 700 B.C. His figures are for the latitude 39° N. This is the latitude of Smyrna, the assumed home of Homer, and the approximate latitude of Corcyra, the conjectural home of the Phaeacians. Since Odysseus sailed keeping these stars on his right, that is, in an easterly direction, we may presume that this latitude would not be amiss for the home of Calypso, as well as for that of Homer, Alcinous, and Odysseus. Professor Fox's conclusions are as follows:

After allowing for the procession of the equinoxes it is found that in 800 B.C., with a variation of less than two days per century for an earlier or a later date, the Pleiades were visible in lat. 39° N. from dusk to dawn, that is, all night, during the period extending from September 1 to November 2; also that Arcturus, the essential star of the constellation Boötes, set during the hours of daylight, that is, from dawn to dusk, except during the period extending from June 15 to October 21, and that accordingly the setting of Boötes could not have been observed during the period extending from October 21 to June 15. Ursa Major in that latitude is visible each night of the year and hence gives no indication of the season. If a sailor saw during the same night the Pleiades and the setting of Boötes, the latest possible date must have been October 21. At the latitude given and in the century named Boötes remained above the horizon seventeen hours, the Pleiades thirteen hours and forty minutes. The change in season of these stars since 800 B.C., because of the procession of the equinoxes, is about thirty-one days, so that these conditions now would fall about one month later in lat. 39° N., with a corresponding lengthening of the period as the observer moves north.

The fact that Boötes remained so long above the horizon, seventeen hours, seems to furnish the explanation of the phrase, "the late-setting Boötes."

If it was the setting of Boötes which attracted the hero's attention and if this setting could not be seen later than October 21, then it is impossible to assign this voyage to a later season of the year.

With the reliable indications furnished by these most competent and careful calculations I shall try to arrange a definite calendar for the *Odyssey*. Odysseus says that he sailed for seventeen days by the aid of the Pleiades and Boötes and that on the eighteenth day he saw

the land of the Phaeacians, and we may presume accordingly that he paid no further heed to the guidance of the stars; hence we must allow at least seventeen days for the help of the Pleiades and Boötes. Now the last day on which the setting of Boötes could have been seen was October 21, and so accordingly by allowing this utmost limit we shall fix the date of his leaving Calypso as October 5.

Taking this date, October 5, for our starting-point and agreeing with Professor Cauer that this is the twelfth day of the action of the *Odyssey*, we shall see whether or not it agrees with the other indications of the poem.

Professor Cauer in his *Beigaben zu Ilias und Odyssee* has arranged the events of the *Odyssey* according to the days of the action of the poem, whose scheme and figures I shall use as the foundation of my investigation. According to Cauer the events of the *Odyssey* occupy forty days, on the twelfth of which Odysseus sailed from Calypso. By substituting October 5 for the words "the twelfth day" we have the following calendar:

First day of the poem, September 24; on September 26 Telemachus and Athena-Mentor arrived at Pylos; on the evening of September 28 Telemachus and Peisistratus were in the palace of Menelaus in Sparta; on October 24 Odysseus was cast ashore on the land of the Phaeacians, and returned to his own Ithaca on October 28; Telemachus returned from his trip on October 30, and the events of the *Odyssey* concluded on November 2. These dates are gained simply by combining the latest possible date furnished by the proved calculations of astronomy with the scheme of the *Odyssey* already published by Professor Cauer. Do the events and indications of the seasons as suggested by the poem itself agree or disagree with this proposed calendar?

While the *Odyssey* is poetry and not accurate history observing minutely dates and seasons, yet if the conditions of climate, latitude, and seasons will stand this searching test, the arguments advanced by Wilamowitz and Finsler collapse, for they assume, in the words of Finsler, *DLZ*, August 15, 1914, p. 2058: "Wilamowitz hat aber gezeigt, dass wir an mehreren Stellen winterliche Jahreszeit vor uns haben, im Gegensatz zur Telemachie, die für ihre Reise notwendig den Sommer voraussetzt." That is, these two scholars assume the

summer season as the setting of the first four books and of that part of the fifteenth book which tells of the return of Telemachus from Sparta; also they suppose that the rest of the *Odyssey* belongs to the late autumn or early winter; while a calendar based on exact calculations and the impartial table of events furnished by Professor Cauer assigns the events of the *Odyssey*, books i-iv, to the last week of September.

Ithaca lies south of lat. 39° N. and is practically due east of Palermo, or about 150 miles south of Naples, while the climate differs little from that of Corfu. Baedeker says of the climate of Corfu in his *Greece*, p. 252: "The temperature is mild and equable during October and the first half of November, but June (generally), July, August, and (often) September are very hot." The last week of September would then be just the season when the heat of summer has begun to yield to the coolness of autumn. There is but one suggestion in regard to the temperature in the first book, and that concerns the covering under which Telemachus slept; and he needed covering:

a 443: ἔνθ' ὁ γε παννύχιος, κεκαλυμμένος οἰὸς ἀώτῳ.

The fact that this young man slept under a woolen covering or blanket shows that we are dealing, not with the heat of summer, but with the coolness of early autumn. The same observation would apply to the spring, but the later books of the *Odyssey* show that we have here, not the coolness of spring, but that of autumn, since the weather is growing colder and not warmer.

From Ithaca, Telamachus and Athena-Mentor went to Pylos, which has been identified with Navarino, the climate of which is thus described by Mr. Grundy in his *The Great Persian War*, p. viii:

During the four weeks I spent at Navarino the thermometer never fell below 93° Fahrenheit, night or day, and rose to 110° or 112° in the absolute darkness of a closed house at midday. What it was in the sun at this time I do not know. I tried it with my thermometer, forgetting that it only registered up to 140°, with disastrous results to my thermometer.

In the evening, when Telemachus started to go to his ship in order to spend the night there, Nestor was highly indignant, as if resenting the implication that he did not have sufficient covering for an extra bed:

γ 346: Ζεὺς τό γ' ἀλεξήσειε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι,  
ώς ὑμεῖς παρ' ἐμένο θοὴν ἐπὶ νῆα κίστε

ώς τέ τεν ἡ παρὰ πάμπαν ἀνέιμονος ἡδὲ πενιχροῦ,  
φῦ οὖ τι χλαῖναι καὶ ρήγεα πόλλ' ἐνὶ οἰκῷ,  
οὗτ' αὐτῷ μαλακῶς οὔτε ξείνοισιν ἐνεῦδειν,  
αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ πάρα μὲν χλαῖναι καὶ ρήγεα καλά.

The chlaena, as we learn from other passages to be quoted later and from the clever story told by Odysseus to get covering from Eumeus, was used as a covering to give warmth and not as a mattress or pad to make a bed soft. If the weather were the summer weather described by Mr. Grundy, then these words about a bountiful supply of comforters and coverlets were intended by Nestor as a piece of dry humor, but if it be the season which I have assumed, then they are exactly suited to the night air of Pylos at the end of September.

When Telemachus and his companion, Peisistratus, started on their trip to Sparta, they whipped their horses, and their horses were so eager to go that they did not even rest at any period of the day, but kept right on:

γ 484: μάστιξεν δ' ἐλάαν, τῷ δ' οὐκ ἀέκοντε πετέσθην  
ἐς πεδίον, λιπέτην δὲ Πύλου αἰπὺ πτολίεθρον.  
οἱ δὲ πανημέριοι σένον ζυγὸν ἀμφὶς ἔχοντες.

During the long, hot days of summer they could not have traveled all day, but must have rested during the heat of the noon, and limited their going to the cool hours, if there were any cool hours, of the morning and evening. These verses show that the theory I am contesting was not founded on the *Odyssey*, but was an independent conjecture, a conjecture which ignored, not only the more difficult facts of astronomy, but the easily ascertained statements of Homer.

While in the palace of Menelaus, the young men were put to bed and snugly covered. The poet describes their covering thus:

δ 296: ὡς ἔφατ', Ἀργείη δ' Ἐλένη δμωῆσι κέλευσεν  
δέμνι' ὑπ' αιθούσῃ θέμεναι καὶ ρήγεα καλὰ  
πορφύρε' ἐμβαλέειν στορέσαι τ' ἐφύπερθε τάπητας,  
χλαῖνας τ' ἐνθέμεναι οὐλας καθύπερθεν ἔσασθαι.

The two adverbs *ἔφυπερθε*, *καθύπερθεν* prove beyond any question that part of this covering was to be put over them and that part of it was

to be put under them; hence it must have been fairly cool, and so accordingly could not have been the summer weather which these scholars assume.

To these positive arguments for assigning the Telemacheia to the autumn and not to the summer should be added the negative one that there is not a single reference to the heat of the sun, to the pleasure found in a cool shade, or to the necessity of rest during the heated hours of midday. In view of the extreme heat in these lands during summer the silence is most significant, and as Greek literature abounds in references to the pleasure afforded by cooling shade, it must be that the *Odyssey* demands a season of the year when that shade is not appreciated. It seems most likely that Nestor as he sat on the stone seat in front of his house ( $\gamma$  411) was warming himself in the sun rather than cooling himself in the shade, since there is no mention of tree or shade.

The description of the method by which Odysseus guided his course has already been discussed, and it was assumed that he left the island of Calypso on October 5 and came in sight of the land of the Phaeacians on October 21. During these days the Pleiades would have been visible all night and the setting of Boötes would have been a prominent feature in the evening sky. The setting of Boötes could not be observed during the interval from October 21 to June 15. The Pleiades mark the early days of September as the earliest limit, and the setting of Boötes marks October 21 as the latest. That is in lat.  $39^{\circ}$  N. in 800 B.C. The change due to the procession of the equinoxes and also to the fact that Homer lived farther south explains the source of the error of the scholars mentioned, since the setting of Boötes in lat.  $50^{\circ}$  N. may now be seen as late as November 25, and the rising of the Pleiades has grown correspondingly later. This critic and his disciple assumed that there had been no change since Homer, and that Odysseus was sailing in the latitude of Leipzig or Berlin.

On October 23 Odysseus reached Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians. He was naked, and chilled by reason of his long exposure in the sea, yet even so he was in doubt whether to spend the night near the river or to seek shelter from the wind and protection from the cold in a bed of leaves. The fact that a heap of leaves kept him

snug and warm shows that we have the coolness of October rather than the severer weather of early winter.

When Odysseus came into the presence of Nausicaa on the following day he did not seem to be cold, even if he had no sort of clothing to protect him. This is to be expected, since even at the end of October the midday weather is mild in Corcyra. Toward evening, however, it began to grow cold, so that when Nausicaa returned to her room the obliging nurse, Eurymedousa, kindled a fire for her ( $\eta$  7).

On October 28 Odysseus was once more in his native Ithaca, and he found at night that the weather had become raw and chilly, especially because of a bleak and piercing wind. The cold was not severe, since one chlaena was ample covering and the swineherd slept outside his cabin, taking with him only his chlaena and a fleece. The fleece seems to have served him as a protection from the hardness of his bed rather than from the keenness of the cold.

This coolness of the weather seems to have been a matter of indifference to Telemachus, so that with no extra clothing he started early for the city in the morning, while the infirm and ragged beggar preferred to stay by the fire until the sun grew warm. The coolness of the morning and the warmth of the day, when even a ragged beggar would be comfortable, agree perfectly with the conditions of the climate in Ithaca on the last day of October. This delaying until the heat of the day is a shrewd piece of poetic economy which explained to Eumeus the unwillingness of Odysseus to accompany Telemachus to the city.

There are references to a fire in the hall of the palace in the following verses ( $\tau$  55, 64, 506); also the inference that warm covering was needed ( $v$  4).

The last books of the *Odyssey* assume a cooler season than that of the first four books, but there has been an interval of about five weeks since the first meeting of the Ithacans in their assembly. These five weeks were just sufficient to change the delightful days of late September, when a sleeper needed only a woolen blanket and when a team of horses had the spirit to travel during the midday hours, into the colder days of late October, when a poorly clad beggar preferred to spend his mornings by the fire. The first four books do

not fit into the summer weather and the last books do not fit into the winter weather of Ithaca.

Homer in all this is entirely consistent, and the forty days implied in the story of the *Odyssey* exactly correspond with the climate of Odyssean lands during mid-autumn, that is, from late September until early November. This is the clear indication not only of the *Odyssey* but also of the stars as seen in the time of Homer and from the lands of Homer.

It has already been suggested in this paper that the fact that Boötes is above the horizon seventeen hours daily may point to the meaning of the phrase, "the late-setting Boötes." In that case it is only a fixed epithet and has no reference to the actual observance by Odysseus of the setting of that constellation, just as the Cyclops spread his hands toward the "starry heavens" in broad daylight when no stars could be seen.

There is no night in the year when Boötes is not visible for several hours; hence it can give no indication of the season, if we regard the phrase "late-setting" as a fixed epithet. We are thus thrown back to the single consideration of the Pleiades, and they could have been seen during the entire autumn practically every hour of the night in the latitude and time of Homer. The stars watched by Odysseus give thus only a vague clue to the seasons and we must rely on the evidence of the poem independent of the stars.

The indications of the *Odyssey* point directly to the end of September for the opening of the poem, the beginning of November for its close. This assumption is favored by the position of the stars, whether we assume that Odysseus saw the setting of Boötes or that the words *δύε δύων* are a fixed epic expression.

Professor Shorey suggested this second interpretation, an interpretation which is in harmony with epic usage and also renders impossible the assumed contradiction in the seasons of the *Odyssey*.